

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

**This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:**

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1. (currently amended): ~~An equol-producing lactic acid bacteria containing A~~ composition comprising, as an essential component thereof, a biologically pure culture of a lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* and wherein the bacterial strain ~~hashaving~~ an ability to utilize at least one daidzein compound selected from the group consisting of daidzein glycosides, daidzein, and dihydrodaidzein to produce equol.

2. (original): The composition according to Claim 1, wherein said lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* is *Lactococcus garvieae*.

3. (currently amended): The composition according to Claim 2, wherein said lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to *Lactococcus* is *Lactococcus garvieae* 20-92 deposited under FERM BP-10036.

4. (original): The composition according to Claim 1 further comprising at least one member selected from the group consisting of daidzein compounds and daidzein compound-containing ingredients.

5. (original): The composition according to Claim 4, wherein the daidzein compound-containing ingredient is soybean flour or soy milk.

6. (original): The composition according to Claim 4 which is in the form of a beverage or a milk product.

7. (original): The composition according to Claim 4 further comprising equol.

8. (original): The composition according to Claim 7 which is in the form of a fermentation product of soy milk.

9. (withdrawn-currently amended): A method of producing equol comprising the step of letting a biologically pure culture of lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus*, wherein the bacterial strain has~~having~~ an ability to utilize a daidzein compound to produce equol, act on at least one member selected from the group consisting of daidzein compounds and daidzein compound-containing ingredients.

10. (withdrawn): The method according to Claim 9, wherein said lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* is *Lactococcus garvieae*.

11. (withdrawn-currently amended): The method according to Claim 10 wherein said lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* is *Lactococcus garvieae* 20-92 deposited under FERM BP-10036.

12. **(withdrawn):** The method according to Claim 9, wherein the daidzein compound-containing ingredient is soybean flour or soy milk.

13. **(original):** A lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* as deposited under FERM BP-10036.